

Several years ago a recruitment slogan for the United States Army declared: "Be all that you can be."

Although the slogan was intended to encourage young people to enlist in the Army, the statement captures the essence of "doing one's personal best." It is a challenge to raise one's sights and to use more than 10% of the brain – a percentage often quoted when researchers discuss the potential of the human brain.

An Important Attitude

Why do we need to foster personal achievement attitudes in children? How can we help children define their personal best and work toward achievement of that personal best? Just listen to them.

"I want to do it myself."

That cry, which comes from all children at one time or another, reminds parents that children are striving for independence. It happens in every family either in words or in actions: "I want to do it myself."

Whether drawing a picture, pouring milk over cereal, tying shoes, or brushing teeth, children realize that they have to learn to do things themselves – in order to become valid people. Child Psychologist, Dr. Marla Smith, says the expressed desire for independent action represents a significant growth spurt in a child's personal development. And parents should encourage that feeling of independence by stepping back to allow the child to grow, to make mistakes, and to grow again.

Parents need to say: "OK, Honey. You do it and let me know if I can help you."

Gradually and naturally parents turn over to the child more and more activities – first, personal care activities, such as washing their hands and putting on their clothes; to family orderliness, as in putting away toys; then to social responsibilities, such as clearing the table after eating; then to learning activities in school, for example, knowing and doing homework and setting personal learning goals. In that long



sentence, we covered quite a few years in the life of a child and a parent.

But it points to a powerful truth about parenting: across many years, parents guide their children towards independence by listening to them say they are ready to grow, then by guiding them in knowing that independence involves both freedom and responsibility.

For example, when a child says he is ready to ride a two-wheel bike, you may give him that freedom as long as he rides on the sidewalk. Riding in the street is too dangerous at first. Children need the concept that their freedoms are associated with doing their best as a responsible person.

The goal is to lead children to set goals and to work to the best of their abilities. Doing one's best does not mean being perfect or outdoing

someone else. It means recognizing that he or she performed at a personally high level and can reward themselves for their achievement. "I did my best."

Family members show care and encouragement by standing ready to help. When children move from drilling on math facts to math story problems, they may need step by step guidance. Someone can help them sort out the story problem: What is the question? What functions will you need to solve the problem? Is your result a reasonable answer?

In difficult times, someone is there to offer help.

inside this issue...	Doing One's Best	1
	Goal-Setting and Self-Direction	2
	Motivating Children	3
	Self-Mastery	5

Goal setting and self-direction

A sense of integrity

Does doing one's best require super human effort? Not at all. But it does demand some thought on the part of the individual. Each person has to set a personal image of what it means to do one's best. In abstract terms, it means the following:

- Setting a goal or having an image of success
- Being interested in or excited about achieving the goal
- Becoming a self-directed learner
- Having pride in trying hard to achieve success

We might suggest that the overall goal of schooling is to help learners determine their purposes, to find the information they need to make informed decisions, to function as responsible citizens, and to work in a disciplined manner in achieving their purposes. Parents and teachers join forces in developing these individuals who would be self-directed learners.

What are the skills and knowledge needed?

Attitudes

Self-directed learners aren't overconfident loners. They simply realize that they have valuable questions to ask and that they know where to go to find the answers, whether alone or in cooperation with others. It is this realization that enables them to set the standards that become their benchmarks.

Skills

Skills are those learned behaviors that enable a person to function almost automatically in certain activities, such as, reading, computing, writing, studying, public speaking. As a means for gaining personal competence, the learner develops decoding skills, spelling skills, math facts, note-taking skills, speaking skills and similar skills. To acquire these skills usually requires discipline and practice. Once learned, they assist students in gathering information, making decisions, arguing issues, and even enjoying their leisure hours.

Knowledge

To set goals, to think critically, to distinguish between good and bad, to judge the beautiful from the not-so beautiful, people need knowledge. One cannot solve a problem without having enough information to apply to the targeted issue. One cannot draw valid conclusions without sufficient information.

One of the functions of schooling is to give students knowledge that they can use to reflect, to inform, to criticize and to organize their perception of the world. That's one of the purposes of a school curriculum in literature, mathematics, science, history, and the observation of nature. Without knowledge we cannot act as self-directed learners. We must have knowledge to enable us to move in purposeful directions. For more information on a curriculum for self-directed learners, see *The Self-Directed Learner*, ERIC Publications, 2000.

These attitudes, skills and knowledge of course are developed over many years. Doing one's best is therefore related to the developmental stage of the learner, not the image in the mind of the parent who has years of experience and much practice. Consider these examples and decide how you would have reacted.

The First Written Report

Josie had worked many hours on a class report on the Incas. The assignment was described as a report that gathers and organizes information and presents a clear picture in report format. Josie was a fairly good reader and comprehended well, but this was the first time she had been asked to write a report.

When she got the report back from her teacher it was covered with red marks and had a low grade on the top page. Josie came into her house in tears and showed the ugly paper to her mother. Her mother seemed stunned then became angry, yelling: "You are not trying hard enough. You are too smart to turn in this kind of low level work." Josie cried all the harder.

[As Josie's parent, what would you have done here?]

Impromptu Swim Race

As their parents watched at the pool, Aiko challenged Nicole to a race, once across the pool. Reluctantly Nicole agreed. Nicole was not a strong or practiced swimmer, and Aiko was.

A parent agreed to start the race. But it wasn't much of a race. Aiko wriggled like a fish and zipped to the finish line. Nicole worked hard, splashed a lot, and finally reached the end of the pool. Aiko celebrated her victory by calling Nicole a slow turtle. "You will never win any races."

Nicole's reaction was predictable. Tears welled in her eyes and she went to a corner of the pool to be by herself. Her mother said, "She'll get over it."

[As the parents of Aiko and Nicole, what would you have done here?]



Activities to Motivate Children

Read and Talk

As you watch television or read a book together, use those opportunities to discuss the value of doing the best a person can do, whether the activity is playing soccer or studying for a math quiz.

Here are some ideas that may help your discussions:

- Talk about the difference between winning and the satisfaction of personal achievement.
- Ask your child to describe his or her current best in any activity – music, sports, school, crafts – then compliment your child for that good effort.
- Explain that the word “integrity” is often used to describe a person who always seems to do his or her best.

Read and Write

How can we help children define their personal best?

Expose your child to a wide variety of age appropriate books to illustrate character qualities. Help your child to think about qualities to emulate. Discuss some of those qualities and ask if the character had to overcome adversity. To give your child time to reflect and to clarify personal feelings, suggest that she use a personal journal to write her ideas.

You may also want to develop a note sheet for your child, one that focuses on people she admires.

What three people – living or dead – do you most admire? Why?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

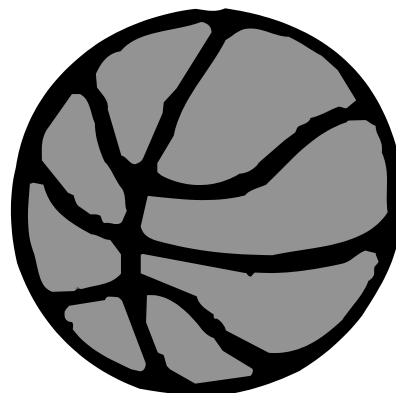
List the qualities in those people that you would like to possess.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What will you do differently because of what you have learned?



Problem/Solution

Read the following anecdote to your children and ask them to write their reactions in their journals. They may want to share their ideas after they have written.

Gary’s mother took him to the “Y” so they both could get some exercise. After walking around the track with his mother, Gary picked up a basketball and tried to shoot some baskets. He didn’t make many baskets and he looked terribly clumsy when he dribbled. He stumbled and his tongue was hanging out of his mouth as he concentrated on throwing the ball toward the hoop.

On the court next to Gary some athletic-looking boys were playing basketball. One of them stopped and pointed to Gary. He got his friends to laugh as he imitated Gary as he stumbled and pushed the ball awkwardly. Gary saw that they were laughing at him and walked away. He was bigger than the boys who were laughing at him, but he couldn’t do anything smoothly and easily. He was a Downs syndrome person.

The next day Gary went to his job. He made beds in a motel along with a crew of people. He worked hard for his floor crew and enjoyed going to work. They seemed to like having him with them. At the end of the day, the manager called all the motel workers together for a monthly meeting. He put his arm around Gary and announced that he had won the employee of the month award because they all agreed that he made beds better than anyone else. He took his award home to show his mother. She made him a chocolate Sundae to celebrate his winning this award.

[Write your reactions in your journal.]

One-year subscription to **Parent Talk** \$18⁰⁰

Parent Talk is also available for distribution to parents in packages of 25: \$15⁰⁰

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-99-CO-0028. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.



Parent Talk

A publication of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication

Editor: Carl B. Smith
Production Editor: Neal Stepp

Published by ERIC/REC & The Family Learning Association
2805 East 10th Street, Suite 140, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698

Motivating Children

Everyone uses the word motivation but, most of us don't think much about what it actually means. We know that motivation has something to do with getting us moving towards important goals. We know that some things seem easy to do because they appeal to us and we think there is going to be a high payoff. Other things are not very interesting even though they may seem important to our parents, teachers, or bosses.

One of my friends once said that he couldn't imagine spending an afternoon watching or going to a baseball game. In fact he didn't even know who the major teams were. He had no interest and no motivation to learn those teams because they were not important to him. I have another friend who can answer almost any trivia question about baseball batting averages, who won the pennant in what year and which pitchers won those pennant games. One of his greatest pleasures is going to the ball park. He's more than willing to fight the traffic and take a day off to see an important game.

What constitutes the difference between these two people? Why is one motivated to learn all the details of the game while the other one doesn't care if it exists or not? That question is at the root of what we call motivation. In order for a person to be motivated the end result, that is the goal, has to be important to that individual.

When we talk about motivating children in school, the same thing holds true. If we are going to move towards a goal two things have to occur: 1) We have to have a clear goal that appeals to us; 2) We have to see that there are definite means to attain that goal.

Parents and teachers have the difficult job of helping children set academic goals and of seeing in their minds eye the steps that it takes to achieve them. For example, how can we get a seven year old second grader to learn math facts ($6 \times 3 = 18$)? Or to find information in a book (what's the life span of a cat)? Those activities have long range importance because they develop skills that will serve children throughout their lives. The question is how do we motivate children to do them when they personally can't see the long range value of that kind of learning? Now you begin to see why motivating young children to do academic tasks is so perplexing.

So how do we do it? Here are four steps you can take to motivate your children.



Step 1. Model curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge.

Children naturally look to important adults in their lives as models of what they should do. They want to please and to imitate important adults. Obviously parents and teachers are important adults to them. That means that if parents want their children to work hard to achieve school learning, parents have to demonstrate with their own lives that school learning is important. They have to seek answers in books or show curiosity about math facts or indicate that it is important to learn what is going on in society and in government in order to vote wisely.

Parents can do those things by asking questions out loud and then asking themselves out loud how they can find the answers to those kind of questions. "I wonder if there is a way for me to learn to use a computer. I could look in the newspaper for an ad that might give me information." Then they can pursue answers in newspapers or encyclopedias or call the library for help. There are all kinds of ways of demonstrating to children that the parent is curious about the world and academic knowledge. Thereby children want to achieve similar attitudes themselves.

Step 2. Praise and reward efforts to learn.

Most children want to please their parents and their teachers. They will respond well when those important adults praise them and occasionally reward them for their efforts. When children ask questions and pursue answers by looking them up in the dictionary or in a newspaper or magazine, parents ought to say to their children: "Hey that's a smart idea. Now you are thinking. You are going to do well if you keep that up."

When a child talks about what is going on in school, the parent can show interest and enthusiasm for what the child is learning. Naturally the parent wants to praise children when they are making progress. That doesn't mean the child has to bring home a paper with an "A" on it. But if a teacher says the child is doing better this week than last week or better this report period than the last report period, that's a time for rejoicing at home. Then the parent can say, "Way to go boy! Now you are working. I'm sure glad to see that you are improving. That's great!"

Continued on page 6

Self-Mastery

Self-direction assumes self-mastery. If one is able to set goals, select means and work towards satisfactory achievement, that person has control and personal discipline. These are qualities that are developed over many years. Usually parents start the process.

The founder of Montessori Schools, Maria Montessori, said, "We call an individual disciplined when he is master of himself, and can, therefore, regulate his own conduct..."

That phrase, "master of himself," may give us direction as we work with children. Some people obviously are not masters of themselves. Recently I met a young man at a train station. I was waiting to catch an early train when a young man in his twenties started talking to me about all kinds of unconnected things. As I wandered to the coffee machine, the schedule display board and even to the restroom, he followed me and talked incessantly. In other words he was quite a nuisance.

Then a policeman approached us and said to the young man, "Hi, Todd. Are you bothering this man?"

"No," he replied. "Just talking."

"Have you got yourself straightened out? The policeman asked. "Are you following your program? Are you taking your medicine? What are you going to do today to make yourself useful?"

I walked away to let them finish their conversation, and I thought about the positive way the policeman handled the situation. He was dealing with a known problem, but he did not try to muscle him away. He asked Todd about his life and what he was doing to improve it. What an excellent example of dignified pressure to make the young man responsible for his own life.

Emphasize consequences

Parents can use a similar approach by asking good questions and ending with, "What are you going to do to improve your situation?" In that way, we show our children that we expect them to be responsible while at the same time we will help them clarify what they have to do to meet their own high expectations.

Here are some ways that you can promote self-mastery:

1. **Clarify expectations.** "Have a clean room" is too vague. You and your child should agree that a clean room means putting dirty clothes in the hamper and vacuuming the floor, etc.
2. **Be considerate.** Praise your child for small steps in making positive progress. Pats of affection can supplement words of praise.
3. **Express your beliefs.** Let your children know that you will provide constructive guidance. Remember the policeman who asked the young man what useful activity he would perform.

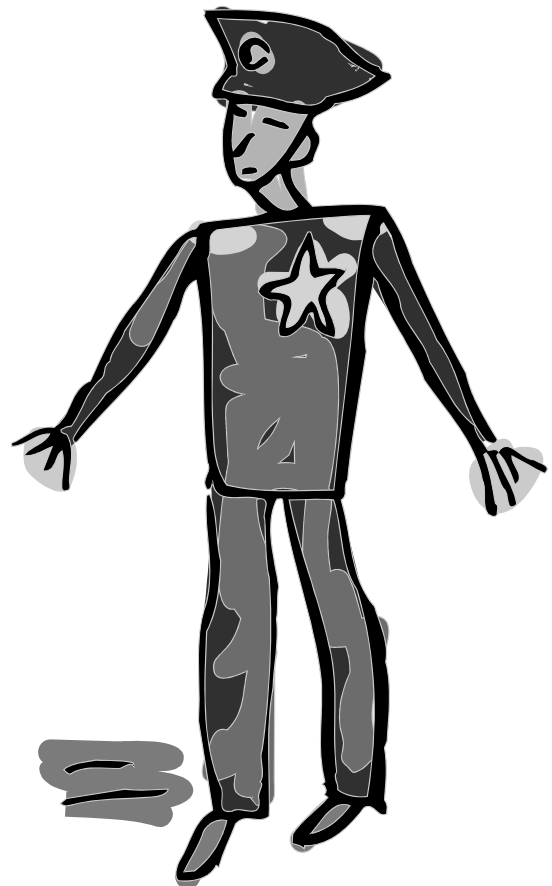
4. **Point out consequences.** Your children should know that their hard work will pay off in better grades and in their own feeling of satisfaction.
5. **Listen attentively.** Avoid giving sermons. Rather, listen to your children's feelings and personal expectations. Then you can praise them for their growth and offer simple guidance where appropriate.

What are the long term effects of helping your children year after year? Read this paragraph written by a young man who was asked why he felt he succeeded in college:

"My parents know all my faults, but to hear them talk (and in my presence, no less) you would think I have few equals. They show me in a hundred ways that they approve of me. When I disappointed them, they never showed anger, but instead assured me that they knew I would do better next time, that I could do great things. Everyone should have at least one person in his life like my parents."

May your children write a similar paragraph about you one day.

(For further information about self-discipline, see *Discipline and Learning*, Family Learning Association, 1999.)



Book Review

Creating a Cooperative Learning Center

Katharine Houk

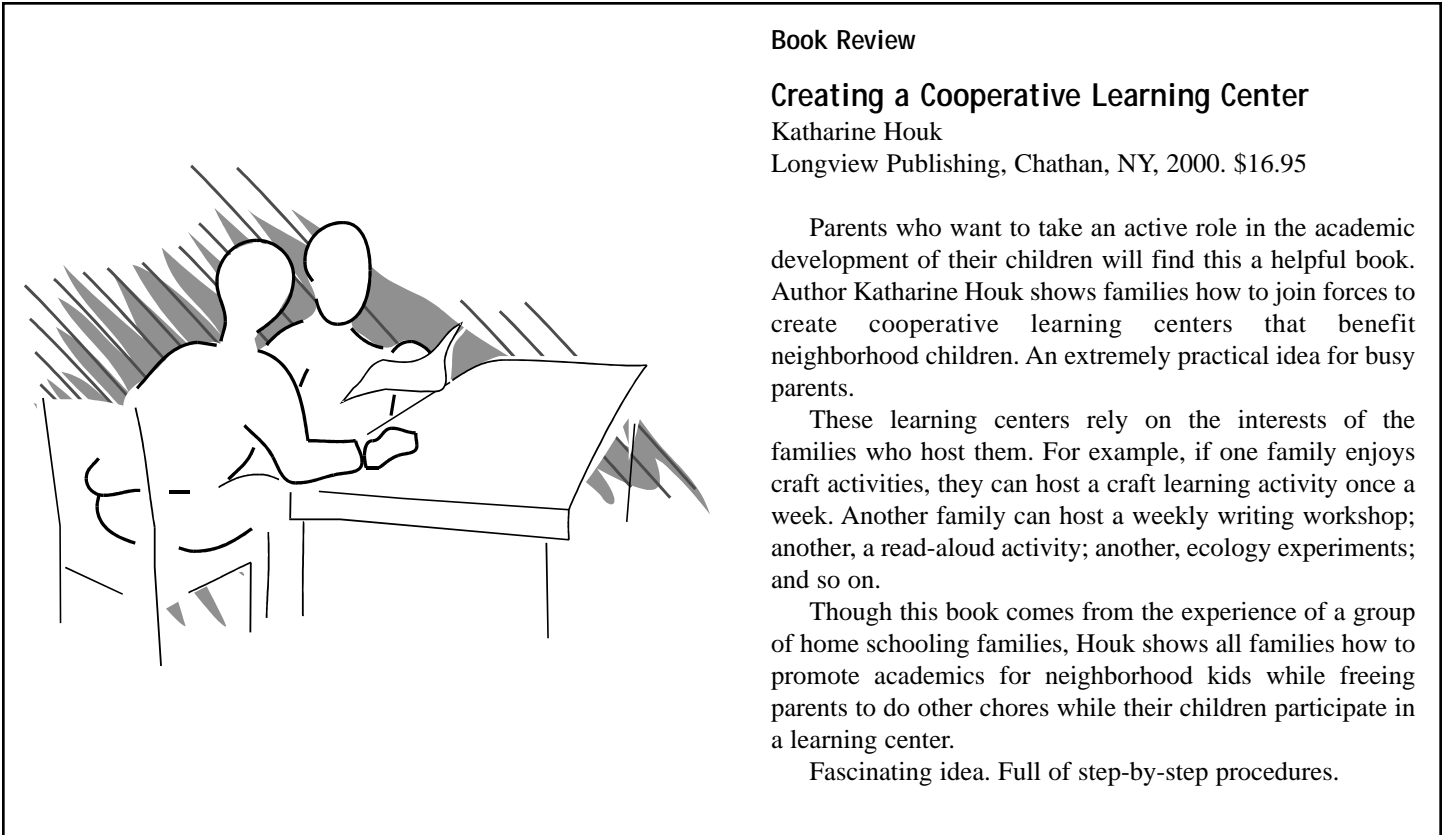
Longview Publishing, Chathan, NY, 2000. \$16.95

Parents who want to take an active role in the academic development of their children will find this a helpful book. Author Katharine Houk shows families how to join forces to create cooperative learning centers that benefit neighborhood children. An extremely practical idea for busy parents.

These learning centers rely on the interests of the families who host them. For example, if one family enjoys craft activities, they can host a craft learning activity once a week. Another family can host a weekly writing workshop; another, a read-aloud activity; another, ecology experiments; and so on.

Though this book comes from the experience of a group of home schooling families, Houk shows all families how to promote academics for neighborhood kids while freeing parents to do other chores while their children participate in a learning center.

Fascinating idea. Full of step-by-step procedures.



Continued from page 4

Step 3. Solve real problems.

One of the best ways to motivate school work is to show that it has application in the real world. For example can we parents show that reading stories enriches our emotional lives? Can we demonstrate that math is used regularly in our shopping, our check writing, our measuring to buy paint for our walls? Can we find information in newspapers and magazines that help us decide how to vote or how to plan a trip or how to solve a health problem? It takes effort and attention to those kinds of details in order for us to help children see that what they are doing in school will pay off in life. Its all part of a well known principle in psychology: the more visible and the more real we can make something, the more likely it is that we will achieve it.

Step 4. Lay out the steps to success.

We said that the goal has to be visible. Its even more important that the means to achieve the goal are clear and concrete. One of the reasons many of us don't achieve our dreams is that we have no sense of how to move concretely from where we are to the dream. I can remember one little third grade boy writing about his dream to be a professional basketball

player like Magic Johnson. In his composition he said that all of his friends, teachers and parents thought that he would never be like Magic Johnson because he was too clumsy and was not fast enough. He said that it was really discouraging when no one believed in him.

Wouldn't it have been wonderful if some of those people had given him some direction? Wouldn't it have been uplifting for that child if the parent had said: "If your are going to be like Magic Johnson, you are going to have to learn to run fast and shoot well. Why don't you start by shooting baskets after school every afternoon or by getting on a local Boys Club track team in order to run faster." By doing things like that, the parent would have allowed the boy to keep his dream at a point in the child's life when it's so important to encourage and to support.

Conclusions:

Motivation for children is not simply interest and it is not gimmicky things that simply catch children's attention. Motivation means focusing on a goal and identifying the clear steps needed to achieve that goal. Parents play an extremely important role in helping children become motivated for school work, as in steps 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Resources

2

FREE Read-along books—stories & illustrations
with \$50 order...a \$14 value!



Student Planner (52 Weeks—August to July)

Kids like being organized and planning for school. These character development planners will help them and instruct them in character development. The planners are 2 color, spiral bound, 112 pages and 11"x17" open.

Planner Features:

Study Tips • Organization Tips • Action Tips • Heroes & Books
Famous Quotes • Parent Comment Box • Assignment check-offs
Large writing space • Facts • Jokes • Riddles & more!

Each month highlights a specific trait:

Doing One's Best • Civility • Responsibility • Living Peaceably
Sharing • Honesty • Respect • Caring Courage of Convictions
Perseverance • Time Management • Golden Rule

\$5.95 ea. • PS-480-2200 • For bulk pricing, call 1-800-759-4723



Learning Activities For Infants And Toddlers

by Stan Wonderley

Whether you are looking for an occasional activity to promote learning or are looking for a daily stimulus, this book contains almost 200 learning activities for preschool age children. Its clear directions and illustrations make this an indispensable guide for young parents or for pre-schools. 231pp; \$17.95; PS-175-2144



The Curious Learner

by Marjorie R. Simic, Melinda McClain, Michael Shermis

This easy-to-use resource contains practical advice and fun activities that help your children explore math, science, history, poetry, music, art, and writing. There is a special chapter to guide you in making the most out of the public library. 155pp; \$12.95; PS-100-1013

Create positive attitudes and a hunger in children for reading and writing. These down-to-earth books offer practical guidance and step-by-step solutions to engage children in active learning.



The Self-Directed Learner

by Dr. Carl Smith

The Self-Directed Learner describes the underlying principles of learning through individual responsibility. The book lays out a detailed curriculum that parents and teachers can follow to develop children to take control of their own learning. It contains practical advice on helping your children become self-directed learners. 62pp.; \$10.95; PS-158-2029

Buy all 5 for \$46.50

Creating Life-Long Readers

Creating Life-Long Readers provides several strategies for creating positive attitudes towards reading through literature, reading aloud, and book conversations. Included are read-along booklists for pre-school to 6th-grade, and insights into how and what books to select for your child. This book contains practical activities on creating life-long readers. 78pp.; \$10.95; PS-158-2031

Buy all 5 for \$46.50

Using Phonics and Other Word Skills

Using Phonics and Other Word Skills introduces sound-spelling patterns, and other practical techniques for identifying words. Included are exercises for listening and seeing words, phonics, and a special section on understanding word structure. This book contains practical activities on phonics and word skills. 63pp.; \$10.95; PS-158-2028

Buy all 5 for \$46.50

Reading to Learn

Reading to Learn focuses on how to study as you read, using the PARS approach (Purpose, Ask, Read, Summarize) to increase reading flexibility and speed. The book also shows how to follow instructions (written and spoken), and how to read graphs and tables. This book contains practical activities on studying. 62pp.; \$10.95; PS-158-2030

Buy all 5 for \$46.50

Improving Reading and Learning

Improving Reading and Learning shows you how to cultivate an environment where your child can learn to read, and the first steps to build comprehension. Included are questions to ask to aid thinking, and five delightful stories to practice reading skills and learning techniques. 71pp.; \$10.95; PS-158-2027

Buy all 5 for \$46.50

QTY.	ORDER NO.	TITLE	PRICE	SUBTOTAL
	PS-480-2200	Student Planner—Character Development	\$5.95	
	PS-175-2144	Learning Activities For Infants and Toddlers	\$17.95	
	PS-100-1013	The Curious Learner	\$12.95	
	PS-158-2029	The Self-Directed Learner Series	\$46.50	
	PS-F58-2035	Parent Talk Bulletins - annual	\$18.95	
<input type="checkbox"/> I have ordered \$50 or more. Please send my 2 FREE read-along books.				

4 EASY WAYS TO ORDER!

- PHONE (800) 759-4723
- FAX (812) 331-2776
- MAIL Family Learning Association
3925 Hagan St., Suite 101
Bloomington, IN 47401
- WEB www.kidscanlearn.com

*Shipping

If your order is:	Shipping is:
\$0.00 - \$50.00	\$5.00
\$50.01 - \$250	10% of order
\$250.01 +	8% of order

Subtotal

Shipping*

TOTAL

YOUR SATISFACTION IS GUARANTEED!
If for any reason you are not completely satisfied with a product or publication you purchase from us, simply return the item within 30 days, and we will refund your money.

SHIP TO

NAME _____

TITLE _____

ORGANIZATION _____




ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

PHONE _____

METHOD OF PAYMENT

CHECK ENCLOSED P.O. # _____

   AMEX

CARDHOLDER'S NAME _____

CARD NUMBER _____ EXP. DATE _____

CARDHOLDER'S SIGNATURE _____

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading,
English, and Communication
2805 East 10th St., Suite 140
Bloomington, IN 47408-2698

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Bloomington, IN
Permit No. 2

Your current issue of Parent Talk is enclosed. Make sure you renew your subscription.

YOUR CURRENT ISSUE FOCUSES ON

Doing One's Best

Parent Talk bulletins are for parents who help their children with learning. For more information and a free catalog call 800-759-4723

Please duplicate and distribute any information in this newsletter for parents to share with their children.

In this issue you will find:

- What “doing one’s best” means
- How to help children understand
- Activities for parents and children together
- Self-direction and self-mastery

These topics, plus book reviews and resource information are found within. Distribute this issue to the parents in your school. You may duplicate these eight pages or contact the Family Learning Association for a quantity purchase. ParentTalk Bulletins are available in packs of 25.

Renew your subscription now. Call 1-800-759-4723 or mail in order form.

All these resources come from the research of ERIC and the Family Learning Association. Call for information or visit our website:

1-800-759-4723

<http://www.kidscanlearn.com>

<http://eric.indiana.edu>

